

Halo: Freedom from Evil

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Summary: Master Chief, Cortana and the Arbiter discover the secrets of the Forerunners and the Covenant as well as a new enemy in this alternate take on the events following Halo 2. Note: this was written before Halo 3 and Reach as my "ending" to the Halo saga.

1. Part 1: Sinners and Believers

Halo: Freedom from Evil

"Dr. Halsey looked one last time at Number 117-at John. He was having so much fun, running and laughing. For a moment she envied the boy's innocence; hers was long dead. Life or death, lucky or not, she was condemning this boy to a great deal of pain and suffering. But it had to be done." Halo: The Fall of Reach

Part I: Sinners and Believers

Inside the Forerunner ship, the Prophet of Truth stands in the control center before a hologram pad. On the pad is the image of another Prophet, Apathy. Truth is surrounded by Jackals piloting the ship as it heads towards Earth but all of the Prophet's attention is towards Apathy: "Apathy, we are closing in on the human's home world and will be annihilating it shortly."

"Why the haste, brother? I wasn't even aware the Council knew of the location to the human's home planet let alone was planning an attack on it."

"Regret accidentally found the planet and has forced us to attack prematurely."

"I hope the attack will go smoothly. The recent transmission I have received that tells of civil war within the Covenant are not pleasing, brother."

"Everything is under control. Tartarus is activating the newly discovered ring and once the humans are extinct nothing will stand in our way."

"Good. Good. Brother, there is something I have to tell you."

"What is it?"

"The Arkâ€|something is going on inside of it."

"What do you speak of?"

"Well, I'm not sure. None of us are sure. It isâ€|"

Just then the prophet is cut off by an alarm going off through the hologram. Truth sits up in his hover-chair: "Apathy, is everything all right?"

The prophet in the hologram looks around: "I don't know. There seems to be an invasion but our defensesâ€|how could we not have noticed this?"

Another sound comes through the hologram, this time an explosion. Apathy looks up as if someone is walking towards him: "Oh no. It's you. Please, show mercy."

"Brother! What is going on?!"

Apathy puts his arms in front of his face as if he is shielding himself from something: "Nooooo!"

The hologram is cut off. Truth looks around the room as the Jackals stare in shock at the hologram pad. Truth snaps at them: "What are you looking at?! We are on the brink of a full scale battle. Get back to work."

The Jackals turn back around and fiddle with the controls of the ship. Truth floats by them while pondering what has just happened to his fellow Prophet.

As the Forerunner ship plummets towards Earth, the Master Chief grabs onto a railing and braces for impact. The ship came directly from the Covenant holy city, High Charity, and was carrying the Prophet of Truth, the last Covenant Hierarchs of High Charity. The gigantic ship is surrounded by a Covenant armada just a little bit smaller than the one that attacked Reach.

Lord Hood assumes that the Covenant rushed an attack and didn't have enough time to gather a large enough force. The truth is that the civil war raging within the Covenant has forced an all out assault on Earth. This attack is out of desperation, one last chance to take out Earth before the entire Covenant crumbles.

Hood, who has just received a signal from Spartan 117 aboard the Forerunner ship, tries to understand what is going on: "Chief, how you plan on stopping them?"

"There is a Prophet aboard this ship. We capture him alive and their fleet will surrender. Lord Hood, there is an uprising within the Covenant. We have a chance to end this war now."

"Ok Chief. I'm going to coordinate the fleet to keep our MAC guns online. You get that Prophet."

The Covenant Cruisers and Seraph fighters battle the UNSC defenses as the Forerunner ship enters Earth's atmosphere. Flames begin to form all around the ship as it speeds up towards the surface and eventually slams into the city streets.

The landing bay of the Forerunner ship opens and a horde of Brutes, Drones and Jackals run out with their weapons firing. An army of Marines are there to meet them and return fire. A wave of bullets and plasma cross back and forth as the two sides fire non-stop. The buildings all around them crumble and fall as they are hit. One after another the gigantic army of humans fall until their numbers are cut in half.

The Covenant forces pound their front line forward, deeper into the city and closer to UNSC Command Post located in the center of the city. The Marines start to retreat as they notice they are greatly overwhelmed.

Just when all hope is lost, an angel falls from the sky. The Master Chief drops down onto the battlefield and immediately the forward progress of the Drones and Jackals is halted by fear. One of them yelps out in shock: "The demon!"

Spartan 117 doesn't even respond. Instead he punches the Jackal and pounds every one after that with fury and rage. He knows this battle can shift the tide of the war completely and is determined to win. One human sees a bunch Drones start to jump all over the Master Chief and yells out: "It's the Mater Chief. He needs our help. Let's get those bastards!"

All at once the army of Marines runs full speed at the entire Covenant line. They scream a battle cry and meet the front row of Jackals with a bang. The battle has turned from a fire fight to an all out brawl with two of the largest armies any side has ever seen. Like a battle from the Middle Ages, the humans fight their foes barbarically and relentlessly leaving none alive. Even the Brutes, who are known for their rage and sheer power, show signs of fear at the madness and brutality of the "pathetic" humans.

The Master Chief grabs a plasma pistol from Drones and kicks the puny alien in the head. Afterwards he charges it up, takes down a Jackal's shield and smashes the alien's skull with the butt of the weapon.

As the Spartan takes on Drone after Drone and Jackal after Jackal he sees, out of the corner of his eye, a Brute charging at him full speed. Right before the Brute is about to tackle him, the Chief bends down in a stance and catches the Brute right where he stands. He looks the beast straight in its eyes: "Not today."

He knees the Brute in its stomach and then tosses it across the battlefield. The Master Chief sees the landing bay of the ship closing and knows the Prophet is going to try and make a cowardly escape. He runs at the ship's doors and dives in just as it was closing.

He quickly runs to the command post slaughtering any Drone or Jackal

in his path. He has to stop the ship before it takes off, otherwise Truth will be impossible to get to. There is no time to spare; no time to breathe.

He sees a Jackal with a beam rifle down a long hallway and uses his super-human reflexes to dodge every shot until he is face to face with the alien. The Jackal trembles in fear before tossing the rifle to the Chief and running away.

The Spartan is done playing around. He grabs the Jackal by the head and drags him through the door in front of him. On the other side are two Brutes dressed in royal uniforms. They are guarding the entrance to the control center.

The Master Chief tosses the absolutely frightened Jackal high in the air towards the two Brutes. The confused Brutes stare in confusion at the Jackal as he flies through the air. While they are distracted, the Master Chief aims the rifle and puts two back to back beam shots through their throats.

After hitting the ground with a thud, the Jackal tries to crawl towards the door but it's no use. The Master Chief tosses aside the overheated rifle and stomps on the Jackal's skull. He then grabs the handle of an energy sword at the side of the door and walks into the control center without fear.

All the Jackals stop their preparations for launch and turn to face the Chief with their guns drawn. The Spartan doesn't even flinch. Instead he snaps the energy sword out, holds it right at the throat of the Prophet of Truth and says three words: "This war's over."

Aboard a UNSC ship headed to Earth, the Elite known as the Arbiter sits in the cargo bay along with several other Elites, Grunts and Hunters that were betrayed by the rest of the Covenant. The Arbiter stares at the ground in shame and humiliation. He thinks about all that he has done in the name of the Covenant and how he wishes he could take it all back. Commander Miranda Keyes slowly walks over to him: "Hello Arbiter."

"Arbiter was the name given to me by the megalomaniacs that fed me lies of hope. You can call me Proditor."

"Ok Proditor. How are you feeling?"

"How do you think I am feeling? Betrayed."

"This is not over. You can still make up for what you have done."

"How? The Oracle would not give us the location of the Ark and I'm sure even if we found it, infiltrating it would surely be impossible."

"Fortunately we have men and women that deal with the impossible."

"You speak of the demons. I will not fight along side one of them."

"The Spartans are not demons. They bring us hope in times of desperation. They have hearts bigger than anyone I have ever met and will fight the rest of the Covenant to the end. Will you join us?"

Proditor, stands up leans on a railing and looks around at the Elites and Grunts who had fought by his side for years. They always charged into battle blindly for the lies of the Prophets: "I remember the day when the ships carrying the Prophets first came to our home world. Our planet was filled with war and chaos. The Prophets gave us a faith. Gave us a name: Elite. Gave us purpose. But most importantly: they gave us a journey. We fell right into their lies and deceit for hopes of being part of something greater: The Covenant. We were fools."

Commander Keyes walks up to him and puts her hand on his shoulder: "In human history there were many times when desperate people would believe lies and follow deceitful leaders with dreams of salvation. But they learned of their wrongdoings and made up for them. There can be redemption, Proditor."

The Elite turns and looks the Commander dead in her eyes: "My troops have suffered enough and been fighting for the Prophet's lies too long. They are going back to their home planets. However, I have been manipulated by the Hierarchs too much to let my vendetta end here. If you find the Ark I will help you...and finish this war."

The Prophet of Truth sits quietly in a cold, dark interrogation room and looks around curiously. It is much different than the accommodations he was used to and he was beginning to finally feel afraid.

The room looks straight out of an old cop movie. The room is bland and empty except for the table and chair across from the Prophet. Truth turns his head and looks intensely at his reflection in the one way glass on the wall.

His concentration is broken by an interrogation specialist from the Office of Naval Intelligence walking into the room. He has a briefcase in his hand and sits on the opposite side of the table than Truth. Once the man is seated he takes a pen, paper, and an earpiece translator out of his briefcase. He sets the pen and paper down on the table and puts the earpiece in right before he pushes a button on the side of the table. Cortana's slick and gorgeous figure pops up from a hologram pad. The Prophet rubs his chin in curiosity: "So you are the human's artificial intelligence that has been giving us so much trouble. I almost admire your ability to be a nuisance."

Cortana barely smirks: "I'll take that as a compliment (I think). But listen, we know who you are Truth and we know of your 'Great Journey.' "

"Oh really? You know nothing of the Great Journey."

"We know a lot more than you do."

"Do you? Do you truly believe that?"

"Halo is a weapon. Activating it would have killed you, us, everyone

and everything in its path. Is that you're 'Great Journey?' Mass suicide?"

The Prophet simply chuckles and leans back slightly in his chair: "You humans are so pathetic. I could never understand how you could ever make it as far as they did."

Cortana looks at the interrogator as he makes a note of that comment. She makes a mental note of it as well. She then focuses her attention back to the Prophet: "What are you talking about?"

"Your species always looks at the problem right in front of your faces, but always fails to notice the questions all around you."

"What questions, Truth?"

"For instance, why we want to destroy humanity."

Cortana completely turns around and looks through the one way glass behind her. On the other side of the glass Admiral Jacobson and Admiral Henson stand side by side watching the interrogation. Jacobson turns to Henson with a look of uncertainty: "I don't like this once bit."

"I know what you mean. Winning that battle was a big step but there are way too many variables right now. Has Dr. Roberts finished her physical report on the Prophet?"

"I don't think so. I told her to let us know whenever she does. Also, Keyes, Johnson, and the rest of the humans from the newly discovered ring are being debriefed. And from what I've heard so far things are only going to get worse. I am especially worried about the information we are gathering from the Monitor they brought back. He keeps speaking in riddles and calling us reclaimers, but from what we have already discovered it is quite disturbing."

"What of the Covenant that came with them? If word got out we were harboring Covenant forces inside an ONI space station there will be chaos."

"I have faith it will be kept hush for now. We will deal with that problem when we have time. Right now the top priority is Mendez's failure. When is he coming in for questioning?"

"Tonight. What are we going to do with him?"

"I'm not sure, but whatever it is we need to do it soon. If not it could mean the end of the human race as we know it."

As he finishes his sentence, the interrogation specialist that was taking notes on the Prophet's behavior walks into the room: "I don't get it."

Jacobson is curious as to his findings: "What don't you get?"

"These beings are regarded as prophets and administrative thinkers to the other members of the Covenant, yet I find no forms of thinking different than that of any normal human being."

"What are you talking about?"

"This being is not smarter than any man. If anything, there are humans that probably have IQ's that surpass his."

"Could he be faking his true intelligence?"

"I doubt it. Cortana is riding him pretty hard. It would be difficult for him to out think her as fast as she is spitting out questions. My only assumption is that he is not actually a real prophet, just faking it."

Jacobson and Henson turn towards each other as they both smile at the interrogator's newest findings.

As Spartan 117 quietly stands in the launch bay of a UNSC orbital defense station, he watches as about a dozen ships take off with a whole Covenant squadron to take them back to their home worlds. The Chief stands with his crisp, bright uniform on and stands out like a bright light among all others. Commander Miranda Keyes walks over to him and stands by him watching the ships take off.: "Hey, Chief. I see you are done being debriefed."

"Yes. Just making sure every last one of them gets off this station."

"It doesn't seem right does it?"

"Letting them go home? Why not? They don't want to fight us anymore. Don't need to."

"Yeah I guess so. Ending the war is what matters, but all those humans that died. Do they not deserve justice?"

"I stood by their side as many of them perished, Spartans included. But they did not die for themselves. They died for humanity. As long as the human race lives on then their deaths were not in vain."

Just then a voice echoes from behind the two: "But what about my people? When do they see justice?"

Keyes and the Chief turn around and see Proditor walking towards them: "I am not your enemy any longer demon, but make no mistake: I am not your ally."

"The feeling is mutual."

Proditor stops in front of the Chief and points his long slender Elite finger on the soldier's clean, white uniform: "As long as we share a common enemy I will uphold this alliance, but once that enemy is gone I want nothing to do with you."

He turns his head towards Keyes: "Any of you."

The proud Elite turns back around and heads into the ship. Keyes and the Chief look at each other but neither says a word.

Later that night, the Chief was going for a walk around the defense station when he came across an old friend. Chief Petty Officer Mendez's head was down when he passed by the Spartan and didn't even

notice him.

Mendez was the drill instructor of the Spartan II project and taught them how to be soldiers but more importantly, how to be a squad. He turned them from kids to warriors and John will always respect him for that. Spartan 117 barely recognized his old C.O. He always remembered Mendez as a hard ass that never took any of their shit, but now he walked with a limp and hid his face in what the Chief could only think of as shame.

The Chief stops right in front of Mendez's path and salutes: "It's good to see you, sir?"

Mendez stops and slowly looks up: "What the hell 117? Is that you? God damn, it's been a while."

"Yes it has and a lot has happened since then. I see you've seen some fire." "Yeah. I took a bullet in the leg. Nothing compared to the massacre on Reach from what I've heard. I'm terribly sorry about the others. I always considered it the greatest honor I've ever had being able to have trained them."

"And you did one hell of a job. Speaking of which, I heard rumors of what you've been up. Is it true? Should we be expecting more Spartans soon?"

"I really can't talk about that. In fact..."

A booming voice from inside a room breaks his sentence: "Mendez! I wanted you in here five minutes ago! I hear you out there!"

Mendez yells over his shoulder: "Sorry, sir. I have to go, Chief. It's been good seeing you."

As Spartan 117 watches his former instructor limp away he feels sympathy for whatever is bringing Mendez's spirits down so much.

Admiral Henson walks into a room and sees the Prophet of Truth strapped to a chair with his head locked firmly against the headrest. There are wires attached to the back of the chair and the wires lead to a control panel against the far wall of the room. Sitting at the control panel is a routine naval technician. Henson makes sure the technician has no translator in his ear to hear their conversation. He then puts a translator in his own ear and turns towards the Prophet: "Greetings. My name is Admiral Tom Henson. I hope our accommodations are to your liking."

"You will pay for this human. The Gods will not rest until the blood of you and your entire race flows like a river through the stars."

"You can drop the biblical act. Our doctors who studied you concluded that you have no prophetic powers. We have scam artist palm readers on our planet that are more psychic than you. So what's the deal? Why convince several races that you are prophets? Why gather followers? And why start a war with us?!"

"You want to know the answers to so many questions but I continue to ask myself: if you know the answers will it make any

difference."

Henson nods his head towards the technician who then flips a switch. An electrical current runs through the Prophet's chair shocking him. The Prophet squirms in his seat and yells out in pain. After several seconds, the technician flips the switch off and the electrocution stops. Henson stands tall and doesn't even move as the Prophet continues to whine in pain: "Our doctors also told us that your bodies are even weaker than ours. This is a torture chair. What you believe and what you want doesn't matter. All that matters is that you will feel pain until we get the information we desire."

"You don't understand. I can't let you knowâ€|"

"Fine by me."

Henson nods at the technician. The technician nods back but stops when he hears the alien yell something out. He doesn't understand the word the Prophet said so he turns to the Admiral who signals him not to flip the switch. Admiral Henson walks slowly towards Truth: "You ready to talk?"

"I can't tell you of the horrors I know. What I can do though is make a deal."

"We don't make deals."

"This is a very simple deal. It will work out greatly in your favor."

"Ok. What is it?"

"One of my fellow Prophets was attacked shortly before we touchdown on your planet. I do not know by what. He was on a planet I believe you will find quite interesting."

Henson is curious: "Go on."

"The deal is: you go to the planet and find whatever attacked my brothers, and in return I will give you the location to the Prophet's home world."

"As intriguing as that does sound, it doesn't answer any of my questions."

"You will find the answers you are looking for there...including the Ark."

"The Ark is there?"

"Yes. But tread with caution human, the knowledge found there can do more damage to your pathetic race than the Covenant ever could."

2. Part 2: Gods and Men

Halo: Freedom from Evil

Part II: Gods and Men

After all these years, it's still not easy to put the armor on. Every time he does he thinks of all the training and all the hard work he had to endure. But not once did he question it. Not once did he ever ask 'was it worth it?' The Chief had a job to do and he was going to get it done. That was his purpose. It was his life.

People see the hero he is and ask him if they can be part of the Spartan program all the time. They too want to do something great for humanity, but it's always easy to admire what you don't understand. John didn't want to be a hero when Dr. Halsey and Jacob Keyes first came to see him. He was just a boy. He was six years old. And after all that time, nothing has changed. He didn't want to be a hero then and he doesn't want to be one now. All he wants is to win at any cost.

After he finishes putting the armor on Cortana pops up on a hologram pad near the door: "Thinking of going somewhere without me?"

"Stay here. This war is almost over. The last thing we want to happen is our most important AI to fall into the enemy's hands."

"Oh shut it. I have been through piles and piles of Forerunner data. There is no way I'm not going to see this Ark for myself."

Cortana is different from most AI. Dr. Halsey made her that way; a Smart AI. The Chief hates to admit it but he wouldn't be alive today if it wasn't for her.

"Fine. But if you talk too much I'm going to leave you there."

"Just like you left me at High Charity, right?"

"As I recall you were the one that wanted to stay."

The Chief grabs a chip from the hologram pad and Cortana's image disappears. He then inserts the chip into the back of his helmet and the ice cold feeling of the AI entering his system shoots up and down the Chief's spine. After the feeling is gone the Chief continues the conversation: "So how exactly did you get back here, Cortana?"

"That's classified, even for you Chief."

"Ok then. But what were you doing in Holy Charity's system for so long? Was there another Covenant AI like aboard the Ascendant Justice?"

"Something like that."

The Chief knows Cortana is hiding something, either information or a game plan. He doesn't like it but at the same time he knows Cortana would have good reason to do so and trusts her.

On board a UNSC ship en route to the Prophet's home world, Proditor and Miranda Keyes stand in the holding bay discussing the planet they will be landing on: "As a Spec Ops leader and commanding officer on one of the sacred rings I had knowledge most Elites did not. But not even I knew the location to the Prophet's home planet. There were rumors of a planet that they lived on, but no one knows if that is

the planet they evolved on or if it was an abandoned Forerunner planet they took over. What we do know is that no Brute, Grunt, Eliteâ€¦nothing has ever been down on the surface, only Prophets."

"How many are there?"

"Prophets? Maybe twenty."

"Twenty beings to a whole planet?"

"They were the sacred prophets of the Covenant. We believed them to be our link to the Gods."

"Whatever. When we get there we are going to check every inch of this planet for life and any information about the Ark."

As she finishes her sentence the Master Chief walks over to them: "The preparations on the equipment are complete, Commander."

"Good. When we touchdown on the planetâ€¦"

Proditor cuts her off: "I will not fight alongside the demon."

Sgt. Johnson sees a conflict brewing and steps between them to try and ease tensions: "Listen, split-jaw. We are all in the same boat here. We want the Prophets dead just as much as you do. Don't try to start something now. We need you just as much as you need us. In less than forty eight hours you will be on your way back to whatever rock of a planet you are from and you will never have to see us again. Ok?"

Proditor turns and crosses his arm stubbornly: "Fineâ€¦.wait, what's an hour?" Johnson sighs, shakes his head and walks away.

As the Pelicans touchdown on the planet, millions of marines pour into the alien city. The planet is filled with the species known as the Prophets. There are millions of them. They run and scatter away from marines as the humans stand and stare in wonder as to how many Prophets there are. They weren't expecting to see any of them and here they stand in front of a city filled with life.

The silence of the marines is broken by an ODST screaming: "Kill them! Kill them all!"

After that was said, it was a massacre. The marines shot anything that wasn't human. After a couple seconds of slaughtering the helpless alien race, millions of security Sentinels arrive on the scene. They shoot at the marines and stop the forward progress of the humans. Bullets and energy beams fill the air.

Soon after the Sentinels show up, more security bots arrive. Some the marines have already seen on the rings, others are new models they have never seen before. It doesn't matter to them. The marines fire at them all.

The Chief and Proditor soon enter onto the battlefield and join in on the fire fight. They fire upon every Sentinel they see and head deeper into the city. As they run to the center of the city, Proditor looks on the ground and sees hundreds of Prophet corpses: "How can

this be? There are so many of them."

The Master Chief tries to keep him on task: "Ignore that! We have to reach the center. Stay focused!"

The two of them fight their way out of the battlefield and make it to a temple stationed in the center of the city.

On the outskirts of the temple they see bodies of Prophets completely slaughtered and mutilated. The corpses are mangled beyond anything the two warriors could comprehend, much differently than the dead Prophets on the battlefield they just left.

Cortana, who has been quiet for most of the battle, finally speaks: "We were the first UNSC forces to reach this area. We didn't kill these Prophets. Besides, I don't even think a human can do this."

Proditor goes over to one of the bodies and kneels down: "They told us they were prophets. We believed them."

Cortana watches from inside the Chief's armor as the Elite kneels over the bodies: "I can't believe the Covenant Prophets existed in these numbers. Head into the temple."

The Chief snickers as he heads through the temple's entrance: "I thought you were going to keep quiet this time around."

The Spartan and Elite fight side by side to get deeper into the temple. After destroying a couple squads of Sentinels they reach what appears to be a grand chamber of the temple. The room is huge. Magnificent symbols and hieroglyphics cover the walls. Proditor and the Master Chief stare in wonder at the magnificence and beauty of the chamber.

At the center of the room there is a platform; almost like some ancient lift. Cortana isn't as easily wondered by the wondrous room: "This must be messages left by the Forerunner."

The Chief stares at the alien language confused: "Can you decipher the symbols?"

Proditor turns and looks at the Spartan: "It is just as puzzling to me as it is to you, human."

"I'm not talking to you. Cortana?"

"I'll get right on it."

After about a minute of waiting Cortana's voice pops back on: "Oh my God."

"What is it?"

Proditor looks at the human strangely: "Who are you talking to?"

"Don't worry about it. Cortana, what did you find?"

"The Forerunner, they wereâ€¦.human."

"What?"

"They were an ancient race of humans. This message tells of the Forerunner in a war with another race and to win that war they created a weapon: the Flood. It was meant to be used as biological warfare. It would attack the enemy and consume all life, but they couldn't control it. To contain their own creation, the Forerunner built the Halo system as both a prison and a failsafe. If the Flood escaped thenâ€¦"

"Yeah, yeah I got that part."

Both the Elite and the Spartan continue to examine the room while Cortana explained her findings: "The Prophets must have landed on this planet, found this temple and made it their duty to destroy humanity. They created the Covenant not for religious reasonsâ€¦but they actually believed that humans needed to be destroyed. They thought humanity was evil for creating such a terror."

" 'The monument of all your sins.' That's what the Venus flytrap on Delta Halo said. God damn it! How could we have not seen this?"

As the Master Chief continues to examine the symbols on the wall, he hears a bullet from a sniper rifle click into place behind him. He turns around as fast as he can only to watch the bullet go straight through the back of Proditor's head. John stares in horror as brain matter and blood spill out the front of the Elite's head and the corpse of the honorable alien drops to the floor lifeless.

The Master Chief finishes turning around and sees a mysterious Spartan standing in the doorway with a sniper rifle pointed right at him. The new Spartan is wearing MJOLNIR armor similar to the Chief's with minor changes. The mysterious Spartan slowly starts to walk towards the Chief while keeping his rifle aimed at his target: "You of all people should know about the sins of man."

John grinds his teeth underneath his helmet: "Who are you?"

"What? You don't recognize your own brethren?"

"You're no Spartan."

"You know, it's funny. Mendez said the same thingâ€¦right before I put a bullet through his leg."

"So you're one of the new Spartans he's been training."

"And you must be the legendary Master Chief. Nice to meet you."

The mysterious Spartan takes the butt of the rifle and slams it into the Chief's head. Spartan 117 falls to the ground and as he slips into unconsciousness he hears his enemy's last words: "Welcome to the sins of our forefathers, brother."

3. Part 3: Demons and Devils

Halo: Freedom from Evil

Part III: Demons and Devils

The Master Chief shakes the cobwebs out of his head as he starts to regain consciousness. His sight soon comes back into focus and he quickly looks around the room. It looks like a prison similar to that on the first Halo he encountered. He listens closely and hears the Flood all around him. Cortana notifies him of them anyway: "I'm detecting Flood in those containment cells."

"Thanks. I haven't noticed."

Spartan 117 knows this scene all too well. He looks up and sees a window overlooking the room. Standing by the window is the mysterious Spartan who just knocked him out. The Spartan's voice booms over an intercom into the room: "Rise and shine, Chief. It's about time you awoke. I was getting bored."

"Where am I?"

"In the Ark deep below the planet's surface. This is a Flood containment facility."

"Who are you?"

"Isn't it obvious? I'm your replacement. The military never looked at the Spartans as anything more than equipment. And like all machinery; newer, better, more efficient machines are built sooner or later to get the job done."

"But as I can see you aren't going to do that job, are you?"

"No. I am not."

"And why is that?"

"Spartan 117, what's your name?"

"What?"

"You're real name. What is it?"

"John."

"Hello, John. I'm Chris. I never did like having my name being replaced by a number. I guess it's easier to send us on suicide missions that way."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the Spartan program: the greatest crime our military has ever committed."

"Oh please."

"You were in training just like me and you never thought about what they were doing once? Never questioned it?"

"I believed in it."

"How? Open your eyes, John. They fed us lies and forced us into a

life we never asked for."

"We were chosen. Chosen to defend Earth and humanity."

"Bullshit! Everyday I had to listen while that Spanish fuck screamed at me and gave me orders. I was sleeping quietly in my bed and they grabbed me, John. They grabbed all of us and threw us into a life of torment and suffering. We were children. I was a little kid and all I wanted was to go home. Then, when I thought nothing could get any worseâ€¦what did they do? They cut me open and made me a machine. A monster. They strapped me to some bed and played Frankenstein with my body. I did what they wanted. I completed the missions they sent me on. But every second of every day I dreamt of killing them all. All of them that did this to me. We all did. They treated us like shit and we were going to make them pay."

"You revolted didn't you? That is why Mendez was being questioned by the ONI."

"Once we got word of the recent information the UNSC acquired we couldn't waste any time. We took over the base and killed all but Mendez. I had fun making him watch. Then we hijacked a ship and headed here to the Prophet's home world to be here waiting when the UNSC forces arrived. That's when we came across the temple."

"Where are the rest of your Spartans?"

"The Prophets chose one member of the Covenant that would lead them through what they believed to be the 'Great Journey.' The rest of the Spartans are on the surface and I will be the one chosen to lead themâ€¦usâ€¦to salvation."

"You're planning on activating the rings aren't you?"

"Every last one of them."

"You will kill everything in the galaxy! What are you thinking?"

"Were our ancestors thinking that the nuclear energy they created for a power source would be turned into a bomb of catastrophic proportions? No. Was Mr. Fujikawa thinking the slipstream technology he invented for travel could be used to wipe out planets in an instant? I don't think so. And did the Forerunners believe the bio-organic virus created to use against their enemies would lead to their eventual demise? Probably not. But it did. And now I will carry out their fate on the rest of us."

"You're insane."

"Humans are evil, John. We created the Flood. We created Halo. We created the Spartans. All tools of death. We don't deserve to live and now all humanity will die along with the universe it has tainted. Goodbye."

As he walks away from the glass, Chris hits a button that releases the Flood in the containment cells onto the room. The Master Chief spins around in circles looking for a way out of the room. Hundreds upon hundreds of carriers swarm at him. The Chief flails his arms and legs about trying to destroy the carriers before they latch onto

him.

As he is fighting for his life, the Master Chief sees a vent duct on the far side of the room. He jumps and fights his way through the endless waves of Flood until he sees the vent within his distance. The chief runs at the vent ignoring all the carriers jumping at him and then dives into it thinking wherever the duct leads must be better than where he just was.

As the Chief slides down the shaft he hears Cortana's rambling: "You know, jumping into a vent without knowing where it leads wasn't exactly your smartest move so far."

The Chief sees an opening in the shaft and drops out from the ceiling into a long hallway. The Spartan hits the floor and rolls to a stop. As he gets up he looks around and sees a hallway much similar to those of the other Forerunner installations. Cortana sees a panel on the side of the wall: "Chief, over there. Insert me into the Ark's systems and I'll be able to track that Spartan to the control room."

As the Master Chief takes the chip out of his helmet the cool feeling of Cortana's presence leaves him. He then puts her into the Ark's system and she pops up on a hologram pad: "Wow. The amount of information, data, schematics, everything is amazing. Ten times that of Halo."

The Chief could care less about what Cortana is experiencing: "Can you or can you not track him?"

"I can do better than that. I can tell you exactly how to get to the control room, but you better hurry. That Spartan has a big jump on you and you better get moving if you want to beat him there."

The Master Chief turns and runs down the hall as fast as he can.

After hours of running through endless hallways and structures throughout the Ark and battling an endless swarm of Sentinels, John finally comes to a giant doorway leading into the control room.

The control room is a giant pit that extends down deep into the Ark's inner mainframe. A platform extends into the center of the room and at the end of it is a control panel. Chris stands by the control panel with the Index in his hand.

The Spartan is punching buttons on the controls and activates a large beam that shoots up from the pit in front of them. He then raises the Index and gets ready to insert it when John gets his attention: "Don't do it, Chris."

Chris turns around: "Impressive. You are every bit as good as the stories I've heard."

"You don't have to do this."

"Do you know what it means to be a Spartan, John? The Spartans of Ancient Greece were cold, ruthless and heartless. Without mercy or remorse they spread their armies across Greece and the Ancient World. They threw plague filled bodies over city walls to spread pestilence

among their enemies. They showed no emotion and felt no regret. We were meant to be their Spartans, John. That's why they created us. We were meant to be their soulless warriors and kill for them without questionâ€|without reason. They ripped us from our homes, robbed us of our lives for what?!"

"For humanity."

"Bullshit! As for as I'm concerned â€|they are no different than the Covenant Prophets: giving us orders from their command posts far from the battlefield. Cowards. Every last one of them. They deserve to die."

"You're a monster."

"I am what they created."

"I am going to stop you."

"You can try."

John unhooks the SMG from his side and charges full speed while firing at his fellow Spartan. A bullet knocks the Index out of Chris's hand and it flies down the hole in front of them.

Chris takes out an energy sword and deflects the bullets coming at him one by one. Every bullet was deflected but it was only meant to be a distraction.

By the time the clip is empty John is a foot in front of Chris and tackles him off the control room's platform and down the chasm in front of them.

As they fall, John grabs onto Chris's arm to keep him from slicing down with his sword. Chris fights as hard as he can to break John's hold on his arm as they tumble, spin and fall deeper into the Ark.

After a couple seconds of freefalling, the two smash onto a platform deep within the Ark's complex. The two slowly get up off the ground and try to regain their senses after the plunge they just took. Chris gets up and looks at his surroundings. They are on a circular platform with Covenant weapons caches all over it. A giant beam runs through a hole in the center of the platform. Next to the beam is another control panel with a slot for the Index.

Chris sees the Index lying on the floor next to it. John notices it as well: "I can just grab it and this would all be over."

"But you won't."

"No. I'm going to kill you first. Then grab it."

"I wouldn't expect anything less."

Chris looks over and sees a weapons cache full of swords. He grabs one and then kicks the cache over towards John. The swords spill out over the floor and two slide towards the Spartan's feet. John picks two up and the blades shoot out. Chris is now holding two swords in his hands as well.

The two Spartans are as different as they are alike. Their pasts are the same. Both stolen from their homes and thrown to the wolves. They were trained with the same tactics by the same man, but they still wound up as different as night and day. One is a legend that fights honorably for his superiors while the other feels betrayed and used by the same men and fights for their destruction.

As Cortana watches the two stare each other down from a cam she can't understand how they could have ended up so different. They both experienced the same training by the same man and still came out with different moralsâ€¦different perspectives on life.

The two Spartans slowly sidestep in a circle while sizing the other up. Chris lunges at his foe and John retaliates. The two Spartans duel at light speed with a sword in each hand. They move together like they have been sparring with each other for years. Each attempt Chris makes at victory is blocked by John and vice versa.

As they fight, Chris won't stop talking: "The Covenant call the Spartans demons, John. But that's not true. Every human is a demon. We are all the devils we battle and the evil we fight to end."

"You're the only devil here."

They two continue to fight. Every strike of their swords sends sparks flying and sends echoes of clashing beams through the enormous room.

After several minutes of relentless fighting, the younger and more enduring Spartan finally sees an opening in his opponent. He allows John to lunge past him and then Chris slices across the rib section of his armor. Blood pours out of the gigantic rip in the armor and the fearless Spartan falls to his knees.

Chris circles around his downed opponent like a wolf ready to pounce on his pray. Chris then slices down across John's back causing another gash in the armor. John drops his swords and falls face first on the floor.

Chris continues to circle around his foe while stomping on his motionless body. John struggles for every breath while Chris stands over him: "The age of man has come to an end, my brother. No longer shall the plague that is humanity be a tourniquet upon the universe. This galaxy will fall and from its ashes shall rise a new existence. An existence free from the evils of man."

Chris walks over to the control panel and picks up the Index from the floor. As John lies on the floor in pain he looks around for something, anything he could use to stop the maniac.

Just when he is about to give up, John sees a sword lying on the ground within reaching distance. Chris holds the Index over the slot with both hands and smiles: "Let the 'Great Journey' into the afterlife begin."

As he lowers the index into the control panel, John grabs the sword and throws it as hard as he can towards the insane Spartan. Right before the Index enters the control panel, the Sword that was

spinning towards him thrusts through Chris's chest. Chris looks down and sees the energy blade sticking through his chest. The Spartan drops the Index and slowly turns around towards John. He then drops to his knees as blood drips out from the wound in his armor: "I justâ€¦|wantedâ€¦|to go home."

Chris's corpse then falls to the floor.

John rolls over onto his back: "Cortana!"

The AI pops up on a hologram pad by the control panel: "It's going to be ok, Chief. I activated your remote distress beacon. UNSC forces planet side should be getting here any minute. I sent them a message instructing them to take the lift in the temple down into the Ark."

John looks down at his armor and sees blood seeping through the wounds. He wonders what the marines will think if they see him like this. The Spartans are always looked up to by ordinary men. They seem them as warriors; defenders of humanity. In their minds, the Spartans are everything they want to be: strong, brave, unstoppable.

But the truth is the Spartans are not unstoppable. They bleed, but fight through the pain. They feel fear, but bury it beneath their duty. They die, but live on as heroes.

No Spartan has ever been listed as KIA in the official UNSC records. The powers that be felt that the death of a Spartan would bring down the morale among the troops. John knows this and wonders what the marines that are coming to rescue him would think if they saw the body of a Spartan lying on the ground.

No. He can't let that happen. He knows he might not survive thisâ€¦|but he won't die here. Not now. He fights through the pain and somehow gets to his feet. A worried look grows across Cortana's face: "Uhhh, Chief? I don't think you should be getting up."

The Master Chief simply looks at her and stands tall: "I'm a Spartan, Cortana. We always get up."

The Chief looks up and sees a lift coming down with several marines and medics on it. A smile grows underneath the Chief's helmet. A long deserved smile.

" 'I know this is one of the Chief's exercises. But I don't know what the twist is. Can you tell me, Dr. Halsey? Just this time? How do I win?' Dr. Halsey leaned in closer to John as he closed his eyes and started to breathe deeply. 'I'll tell you how to win, John,' she whispered. 'You have to survive.' " Halo: The Fall of Reach

End
file.